

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

August 16, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. BUNDY

FROM: *WBR*

SUBJECT: Berlin and German Unification: A Problem in Balance and Time.

1. I take it that the current disposition in our Administration is to focus sharply on the question of Western access to West Berlin; to seek a solution to the crisis in terms of this fundamental issue; and to be "flexible" and "realistic" with respect to ancillary issues.
2. In particular, the view is taken that it is undignified to force attention on the question of German reunification because we do not believe German reunification now to be negotiable on terms acceptable to us and we are unprepared to fight a war to reunify Germany.
3. I do not disagree with this frame of mind; but I believe it to be an insufficient approach to the problem we face.
4. Specifically, we must remember that what is at stake here -- and has always been at stake from Khrushchev's point of view -- is the long-run expectations of the West Berliners. Their will to go on living and working in that setting depends primarily, of course, on whether or not they feel secure about Western access. But it also depends on whether they believe that the unity of Germany and the unity of their city are conceivable long-run eventualities. They are probably more realistic about the impossibility of reunifying Berlin and Germany now than we are. But men live by long-run visions. The current Soviet moves are designed, in part, to damage their vision. The closing off of East Berlin from West Berlin is their alternative, at the moment, to salami tactics applied to Western access. If we abandon our long-run commitment to the goal of German unity, if we abandon our faith in the historical logic of German reunification, if we take too narrow and mechanical a view of the nature of the Berlin crisis, we shall reinforce Khrushchev's policy and risk damage to the stability of expectations of the West Berliners.

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DATE 12-18-89 BY SP-10

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*Copy to: Kissinger  
Henry Kissinger  
Carl Kaysen*

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5. What can be said of the West Berliners can be said in more dilute form about the West Germans in general. There is no doubt that the West Germans do not wish to fight a war now to reunify Germany. There is no doubt that many of them are cynical about reunifying Germany. Nevertheless, beneath this surface of "realism," the issue of German reunification is a most powerful force in German politics. Unless we are exceedingly careful with respect to our language on the reunification issue; the degree of de facto recognition of the GDR; and our stance during these negotiations as a whole, we may trigger in the West Germans a conviction that the West has accepted a split Germany for the long pull, and that they must look to reunification by their own actions.

6. Concretely, this could mean two things. It could mean a rise in West German sentiment and an increase in West German action designed to subvert and to overthrow the GDR. Or it could mean that the West Germans would look increasingly to a deal with Moscow designed to give them some kind of unity at the expense of the Western connection. Neither form of action is in the American interest.

7. For these reasons I believe it is important, while dealing with the immediate crisis in Berlin, on a hard-minded basis, without illusion, that we not permit ourselves -- in language or negotiation -- to permit the Germans to believe that we have abandoned the faith, and wholly destroyed the mechanisms by which unification might be pursued as an historical process. It is possible to debate whether this historical faith will prove justified. It is a sober fact of political life, however -- illustrated by today's rally in West Berlin -- that reunification remains a powerful force in German sentiment and political life. We shall disassociate ourselves from that sentiment to our peril.

8. What follows?

-- We should continue to emphasize in all our formal positions not merely the illegality of the formal split of Berlin, but its unwisdom, and the threat to the peace involved in making East Germany a concentration camp.

-- We should urgently consider a UN initiative -- temperate in tone -- but making, with all Adlai's skill, the point that a sustained effort definitively to split this town and this country, contrary to the forces of history and the rising pressure of all peoples for self-determination, is a danger to the peace.

-- We should take more seriously than we have thus far taken the Western response appropriate to a separate peace treaty. Whatever our own sense of objectivity and disengagement in the matter, we could really split the Germans from the West if we adopted the British position pur on this.

-- More important, we should make such a fuss about the split of Berlin that Moscow will increase its estimate of the worldwide cost to its position of making a unilateral treaty. We should get Adlai to talk about a treaty and, maybe, get the UN to throw its weight against it.

-- Our initial negotiating position on Berlin should continue to contain provisions of the 1959-Thompson kind for moving toward unification by stages, including a willingness to offer special Central European security measures in return for appropriate degrees of self-determination.

-- Our final position must provide that the door to unification is still left ajar; that the GDR is not recognized de jure; and that the understanding is clear in Moscow that the range of East German-West German discourse is contingent on modifications in both Berlin arrangements and in GDR policy and administration.